

November 20, 2003

To: Members of the Virginia Tech Community

From: Mark McNamee, University Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Re: Summary of Forum on Race Conscious Programs

I wish to thank all the members of the university committee who attended the recent Forum on Race Conscious Programs sponsored by the Board of Visitors (BOV) Ad Hoc Committee on Narrow Tailoring, chaired by Ben Davenport. This committee of the Board was formed last spring to provide an opportunity for the university community and the Board to work together to develop new strategies for promoting diversity at Virginia Tech in a changing legal environment. As Provost, I took on the responsibility of leading an effort to obtain complete information about all programs at Virginia Tech with race-conscious components and to work with the Office of the Attorney General of Virginia to ensure that our programs were legally sound. Our interactions with the AG's Office have been open and constructive, and we were able to obtain validation of most of our ongoing programs. We made adjustments to some programs and determined that a small number of programs should not continue in their current form. The list of modified or discontinued programs is on the Provost's web site (www.provost.vt.edu). Also, on the web is the handout from the forum listing the many programs at Virginia Tech that continue to support and improve the diversity of our campus.

The forum was designed to provide information about the status of the review process and to obtain feedback, advice, and comments from the university community. Approximately 300 people (including three BOV members) attended. President Charles Steger and Committee Chair Ben Davenport both reaffirmed the university's commitment to diversity in opening statements. I made a presentation summarizing the review process and outcomes; this is also available on the Provost's web site. With the assistance of Vice President for Multicultural Affairs Ben Dixon, I responded to questions and comments from the audience. A summary of the Q&A session is also on the web. We will be pleased to respond to any and all follow-up questions.

In my view, it is now time for us to focus our time and energy on the future. The challenge is to attract, support, and retain faculty, staff, and students from very diverse backgrounds as part of our ongoing efforts to improve the quality of educational programs and experiences at Virginia Tech. We must ensure that ALL students benefit from the educational advantages of a diverse student body. Virginia Tech should position itself as a leader in developing innovative strategies that demonstrate that excellence and diversity go hand in hand at a major land grant research university. The new Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity provides us with an opportunity to discover and discuss new strategies. We can help do the research that will guide the design, direction, and purpose of new educational strategies.

I wish to thank the BOV for sponsoring the forum and I wish to thank all the participants, who contributed to a candid and productive discussion. Working together, the BOV, the administration, and the faculty, students, and staff at Virginia Tech can move forward.